

The Old Stone Wall

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Historic flax retting pond found in Gilmanton



Flax retting pond in Gilmanton

This fall, staff members from the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources visited a recently discovered pond in Gilmanton that may have been used for retting flax two centuries ago. It may be the only surviving site of its kind in New Hampshire.

Retting is a key part of flax production. It utilizes water to soften and partially rot plant material, making it easier to separate the flax plant's linen fibers from its woody tissues. After harvesting, bundles of dried flax stalks are left to dry so the flaxseed can be threshed out. Next the bundles are submerged in water. A pond of standing water will work, but the resulting odor can be overwhelming. A more desirable alternative is to use a location with constantly running water, such as a pond fed by a stream.

The pond site in Gilmanton includes a slightly submerged stone platform about fifteen feet wide, extending forty feet in length from one side of the pond to the other. The flax bundles would have been laid on the platform to prevent them from touching the muddy bottom of the pond during the retting process.

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The DHR is a state service agency, supported by the State of New Hampshire, by the federal Historic Preservation Fund (through a matching grant administered by the National Park Service of the US Department of the Interior), and by donated funds and services. In addition to its state functions, the DHR is also responsible for administering the federal preservation program in New Hampshire.

According to retired State Architectural Historian Jim Garvin, in a letter sent to the Gilmanton Land Trust: "The production of linen fiber and woven cloth was central to New Hampshire's agricultural economy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Introduced by the first English settlers, the production of linen was greatly increased and enhanced by the arrival of Scotch-Irish immigrants beginning around 1720. This skilled and labor-intensive industry, based upon the farms of New Hampshire, remained a dominant part of rural life and economy until it was swept away by the advent of water-powered cotton mills after 1820."

The historic site is located on an 86-acre parcel of land that the Gilmanton Land Trust hopes to preserve through a conservation easement. Pat Clarke of the Gilmanton Historical Society is currently searching for evidence of flax production by the Swain family, who owned the site from about 1790 until the 1830s. Jon Hall, whose property abuts the pond, was the first to propose the purpose of the mysterious stone platform. For more information about the property, visit: www.gilmantonlandtrust.org. To learn more about flax as a crop, visit: www.jeffersoninstitute.org/pubs/flax.shtml.



Flax grown adjacent to site in Gilmanton

Local Historic Districts of New Hampshire: a new study by PSU students

New Hampshire's first historic districts were created almost fifty years ago. Their diversity reflects the makeup of our state: they are large and small, urban and rural, commercial, industrial and residential. They mark our history from before the Revolutionary War well into the twentieth century.

Historic districting is often touted as a tried and true economic development tool and studies from across the country that focus on preservation's economic impact confirm their benefits. But while studying districts in New Hampshire, graduate students in the Spring 2012 Preservation Planning and Management course at Plymouth State University found more questions than answers. They quickly realized that assembling up-to-date baseline information on the extent of the state's historic districts was an important first step in understanding their benefits and impacts.

The four graduate students contacted each historic district and heritage commission in the state and quickly found many differences among towns. Some commissioners were easily

reached via email; other towns lacked a web site or their town halls were only open on a part-time basis. Researcher Audra Klumb explained that the students "learned a great deal about the inconsistencies between the towns and the commissions, what historic sites they protect, and how they are protected."

The results of their research, "Local Historic Districts of New Hampshire: With Their Historic District Commissions and Heritage Commissions," documents not only which towns have operating historic districts, but also provides links to key information about those districts: web sites (when available), district names, when they were established, ordinances, estimated acreage and more.

The research also shows that in New Hampshire more people live towns with a local historic district than without. The demographic analysis demonstrated that towns or cities with a district tend to be in more densely populated areas and are found mainly in the southern and central parts of the state, with none existing within or north of the White Mountains. However, some common assumptions about historic districts were unfounded. For example, in New Hampshire, local historic districts seem to be slightly more common in municipalities with lower, rather than higher, household incomes.

Local historic districts are not overseen by state or federal entities. Instead, they are established by town or city vote as a tool to manage growth and change. Local volunteers serve on the commission and provide an important source of technical assistance for property owners. The creation of a local historic district differs from other types of historical designations, such as listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The report concludes that in New Hampshire, the effectiveness of local historic districts depends almost exclusively on the local volunteers who serve on the commissions. If one or two volunteers leave, the commission can be "fragile." To remedy this, Klumb explains that the "final report offers ideas to strengthen the importance and permanence of the historic districts, historic district commissions and/or heritage commissions."

To read "Local Historic Districts of New Hampshire: With Their Historic District Commissions and Heritage Commissions," visit the Division of Historical Resources website at: http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/publications/documents/lhd_surveyreport2012.pdf.

Six properties added to State Register

The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources is pleased to announce that the State Historical Resources Council has added six individual properties to the New Hampshire State Register of Historic Places. The most recent additions are:

Chichester's Town House, which now serves as the town library, was built on the site of the town's 18th-century meeting house. Completed in 1847, it has been the seat of town government as well as the library and central meeting place for residents for more than 150 years.

Freedom Village Bandstand, built by 1902 and host to Old Home Day concerts for more than a century, was added to the State Register as part of ongoing work to document the history of Freedom's Schoolhouse Hill. It has been the center of town events since its construction.



The **Grafton Town Library** existed simply as a traveling collection of books until this Colonial

Revival building was constructed in 1921. Its concrete blocks were created on site, using money-saving volunteer labor. The library is viewed as the town's way of paying tribute to the importance of learning.

Keene's Horatio Colony House Museum was constructed in phases: its main building was begun circa 1806, an ell was added circa 1877, a renovation took place in 1898, and additional changes were completed in the 1930s. The building is significant for its architecture, which reflects both its original Federal period of construction as well as its evolution throughout the Victorian era.

Constructed in 1810 as a tavern, the former **Red Hill House in Moultonborough** was purchased in 1893 by the newly formed Moultonborough Grange #197 to serve as its hall. Renovated from 1903 - 1904, it remains an excellent example of a grange hall, with its large meeting hall and stage, as well as its series of entries leading to the grange meeting spaces.

Nelson's 1846 Greek Revival Town Hall is the third town hall built in the community and is an outstanding example of frugality and reuse as it incorporates much of the framing from the second town hall. The building sits on the common and embodies not only the history of the town, but also serves as an example of the functional, adaptable structures common to rural small town government in New Hampshire.

For more information about the New Hampshire State Register, visit: www.nh.gov/nhdhr.

October 2012 excavations at Jefferson VI Paleoindian Site



Sifting in the falling snow

October 11-15, 2012, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and State Archaeologist Dr. Richard A. Boisvert oversaw further investigations at the Jefferson VI Paleoindian Site. Sixty-five volunteers spent a cold, sometimes snowy, long weekend working on a new part of a site which was first examined in 2010. To date, Boisvert has established that there were two hunting party encampments at this 12,000 year old location. The fall excavation yielded solid evidence of further activity on the northern boundary and doubled the size of the area of investigation.

One of the significant findings was the recovery of chipping debris made from Onondaga Chert. This stone is native to northern New York and indicates the presence of long- distance exchange networks.

Public forum on New Hampshire Mid-Century Modern architecture



Library at Phillips Exeter Academy

Lisa Mausolf of LM Preservation has been working with the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources and the New Hampshire Department of Employment Security to develop a list of New Hampshire buildings constructed between 1945 and 1970. Mausolf has also been working with the New Hampshire American Institute of Architects to ascertain and research architects who were working in New Hampshire during this time period. The results of this study will be incorporated into an historic context document on Mid-Century Architecture in New Hampshire. Mausolf will present her findings at a public forum to be held on Tuesday, February 12,

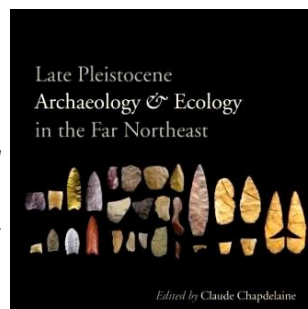
2013 at Concord City Auditorium. Further information will be posted in January on the Division of Historical Resources web site.

If you have a favorite commercial or public building constructed during the last 70 years and have information or photos to share, contact Mausolf at lisa@Impreservation.com.

All Books Great and Small Recommendations from the DHR Staff

Late Pleistocene Archaeology & Ecology in the Far Northeast;
Edited by Claude Chapdelaine; College Station, Texas A & M
University Press, 2012.

Dr. Richard A. Boisvert, deputy state historic preservation officer and state archaeologist, authored one chapter and co-wrote the introduction in this new book that presents the most recent research on northeast archaeology.



Late Pleistocene Archaeology & Ecology in the Far Northeast is a collection of studies pertaining to the earliest known humans who lived in northern New England and adjacent area of Canada. The ten chapters address topics ranging from stone raw mineral sources to potential routes of migration to understanding site layouts. The number of actual sites reported in the Northeast has grown exponentially in the last ten years, bringing forth a plethora of new material for analysis.

Late Pleistocene Archaeology & Ecology in the Far Northeast is available at www.amazon.com.

Learn more about preservation programs

To learn more about historic preservation programs and activities on the horizon, visit the [News and Events Page](#) of the New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, the [NH Preservation Alliance Events web site](#), the [Association of Historical Societies of New Hampshire E-ssociate](#), and the "history" section of nh365.org. Also visit PreservationDirectory.com, a national portal with links to a wide and expanding range of preservation events, sources and resources.

Staff of the NH Division of Historical Resources *prepared this newsletter, edited by Elaine P. Loft.*

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